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## POINT REPORT

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# CIA drugs, brainwashing programme: inside story

Is there a pill which can make a man give away secrets and then forget that he has revealed them? A potion to make a drunken man sober, or one to prevent a sober one from becoming drunk no matter how much alcohol he downs? A way of treating normal-tasting food so that an unsuspecting eater will turn into a confused neurotic full of fears and anxieties?

The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) still does not know, but it spent almost a quarter of a century and R21 million of the taxpayers' money trying to find the answers to those and many similar questions. In 1975, an inquiry committee threw some light on a number of CIA programmes involving the use of hallucinogenic drugs. Among other things that were then brought out was the truth about the death of Frank Olson, a biochemist working for the Department of the Army who threw himself out of a hotel window in New York on November 28, 1953: it turned out that he had served unknowingly as a guinea pig in a CIA experiment with LSD.

It was believed at that time that most of the documents relating to those CIA programmes had been destroyed. That has since been proved false. Only a few weeks ago, seven boxes containing 8 000 pages of records were found in the midst of stored CIA accounting papers. The records give a good idea of the extent of the CIA's "studies of human behaviour", a euphemism which covered an extraordinary variety of offensive as well as defensive experiments in brainwashing and worse. The facts that emerged were confirmed on August 3 at a joint hearing of the Senate Intelligence Committee and the Health sub-committee by Admiral Stansfield Turner, the new CIA director. Turner was able to tell the hearing: "I can assure you that the CIA is in no way engaged in either witting or unwitting testing of drugs today." But no one could erase what had gone before.

Under cover of a programme code-named Bluebird, later rechristened Artichoke, with offshoots like MK-Ultra and MK-Delta, before being "put down the memory hole" in 1973, the CIA carried out 149 experiments connected with brainwashing in the United States and Canada. Eighty different institutions, including universities, prisons, pharmaceutical laboratories and hospitals, took part in the tests - often without realising the purpose or knowing who was behind the programming. The tests included the use of hallucinogens (LSD among them), hypnosis, and physical and mental exhaustion of subjects. The subjects were not always told what was in store for them, the

tutes and once a prestidigitator was brought in to make suggestions.

Looking back on it, Artichoke was born of cold war paranoia. The "high treason" trial of Cardinal Mindszenty had just been staged in Budapest. The prelate's robot behaviour, his haggard eyes and his mechanical confessions, impressed anyone who had read Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*, the story behind the Stalin purge trials in the Soviet Union in the 1930s. When it was launched in 1949, Artichoke may well have been essentially a defensive programme, intended to learn how to insulate American agents against what CIA chiefs feared were potent brainwashing and mind-control techniques developed by the Soviets and the Chinese.

But offensive concepts were quickly brought in. A memorandum on January 25, 1952, spoke of the need to perfect a way to get information from an individual against his will and without his knowing that he had given it. That memo went on to speculate on whether there was a way to gain such control over an individual's mind that he would obey orders not only against his will but "against such fundamental laws of nature as self-preservation."

The CIA, both in the political context of the times and in line with the needs of any secret service, hoped to use behaviour control to crack enemy mental defences or to programme its own agents for any mission. What was wanted was a way to turn amnesia on and off. It might be to question an enemy spy without his remembering that he had given away his superiors. It might be to erase the memories of CIA agents after particularly sensitive missions - or perhaps when they were on the point of retiring and might be tempted by the thought of writing their memoirs about what went on "inside the company."

The army and the CIA shared the same concerns in those days, and the Pentagon worked with the intelligence services on some projects. Hallucinogenic tests were carried out on thousands of soldiers between 1956 and 1974. A high army officer rhapsodised at the 1975 Senate inquiry on the possibilities of drugging enemy regiments for a few hours, making for victories without bloodshed. Under Artichoke, the CIA also worked at times with the Office of Naval Research. More often, however, the "covers" for tests were private research foundations. CIA money was unsuspectingly accepted by the likes of the Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation, one of the world's most respected in the field of medical research, and



Turner: brainwashing - and worse

the CIA set up its own front organisation to cover its projects, calling it The Society for the Investigation of Human Ecology.

Among the tests financed by that society were some investigations of brainwashing carried out at Montreal's McGill University. Some 30 nurses spent half an hour, at regular intervals, in a blacked-out sound-proofed room and their reactions were recorded. One of the nurses had to be hospitalised some months later as a schizophrenic. Over the years, Artichoke moved into neuropsychiatry: the effects of hypnosis, of lack of sleep and food, of electroshocks or ultrasounds beyond the range of human hearing, or hard drugs. Sexual pathology was touched on, as was telepathy.

The guinea pigs were as varied as the range of experiments. Drug addicts were given shots of morphine as a recompense for their test roles. Students were given cheques, soldiers extra furloughs. Cancer patients were promised pain-killers. But sexual psychopaths and the mentally ill simply were not told about the tests, so they did not have to be paid. In 1953, the CIA signed up a magician and gave him R2 600 to draft a manual on applied legerdemain - useful, perhaps, on cloak-and-dagger missions for slipping one of those magic potions in an enemy agent's glass. In the 1950s the CIA sent some operational teams to Europe and Asia. There would be a psychiatrist, a hypnotist, an interrogation specialist. Locked in a "safe house", the team would question day after day an agent whose loyalty had become suspect. For good measure, the suspect would be given "truth serum" injections of pentobarbital. One of the spies who got the full treatment was a Viennese Count who had promised to turn over a Soviet cipher.

When Admiral Turner was asked by the Senate investigators whether he had been able to draw any useful conclusions from the "Midnight Orgasm" reports, the CIA director answered with a laconic "No". It was on that occasion that he assured the inquiry that the